On seeing this couple, almost in a state of stark nakedness, seated on a bench among the cylinders and pistons of the engine, motionless for hours, we were necessarily reminded of the earthly paradise.

When among strangers the women are quiet and impassive, but when left to themselves they are full of fun and as playful as children. And this is generally the Indians' character.

The women take up a somewhat strange posture with their hands when they are standing. As they have no pockets to put them in, or fan with which to occupy them, or what have you, they place them upon their breasts which serve as supports for their arms which together rest upon them.

It would seem that such a habit would enlarge the breasts, but this is not so. The breasts are broad, it is true, but short and erect while the women are young. After expertoe yirum, and having given suck to one or more children, the breasts shrivel and retract in a very unaesthetic manner, to tell the truth. It is to be noted that both men and women age early there, and also die early, and to this must be attributed the fact that there are few gray hairs even when there are faces and bodies so wrinkled as to make one believe that their owners must be as old as Methuselah.

I have gone into some detail in this matter of the breasts because it is known that in other regions, according to what is said, the women, when they give suck, give the nipple over the shoulder to the child which they are carrying on their backs. The fact is that no such thing occurs here.

The women, along with the men, have abundant, coarse, straight hair. They wear it rather long but not as long as they might, for it is shortened by wearing it in an unkempt fashion (which serves them as protection for eyes and forehead against the sun) and also by cutting.

They cut their hair, that on their faces as well as that on their scalps, with the jaw of a fish called palometa, which is armed with extraordinarily sharp teeth placed in two rows. The upper teeth dovetail exactly with the lower.

The palometa, the raya (ray--Translator) and the yacaré (alligator--Translator) are the scourge of those who bathe in this river and the lakes or pools which are fed by it. The palometa snaps, tears

5: Fock E-5 (1962) 1963 SI7 Mataco SI7

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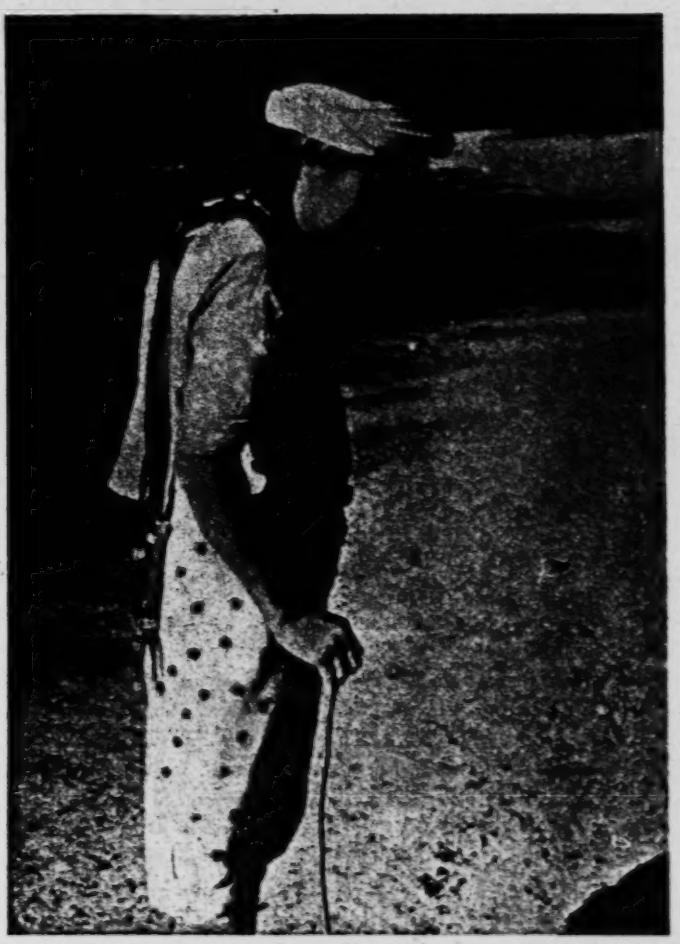

Fig. 1.—Ready and eager for love this Mataco girl carries the red woollen string with bead-tassels on her back. Phot. Fock.

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son-in-law will be awakened by the girl's father and be given orders to go out and fish or hunt. Should he be unfortunate and return empty-handed, he can count on being sent home to his parents the same afternoon, and the connexion is broken. If, on the other hand, the young man has any luck he is allowed to continue with the girl for the time being. A day or so later he will take her out with him to search for food. He will, for example hunt and look for honey, and she will collect *caraguatá* leaves. They go a long way, and she tries to fill the *yica*,

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2: Nordenskiöld E-5 (1908-1909)1919
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Fig. 66. A. Mataco-Vejos woman impressing a finger-print ornament on the rim of an earthenware vessel.